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ABSTRACT

Research has found that the process of writing is similar for both first and second language learners. Therefore, several conclusions can be drawn about writing development in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) children, including: (1) ESL learners can write and can create meaning, while they are learning English; (2) ESL learners can respond to the works of others; and (3) classroom environment has a significant impact on ESL children's development as writers. Teachers, therefore, need to provide opportunities during class for ESL children to use writing to carry out tasks that are meaningful to them, e.g., keeping a diary or journal. Assessment should be based on daily classroom activities and may include keeping writing folders with all of each student's work. Resource organizations are cited and references are given. (DJD)

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

ERIC Digest

Children's Writing in ESL

ED303046

Prepared by Sarah Hudelson *December 1988*

This *Digest* is based on the ERIC/CLL *Language in Education* series monograph entitled *WRITE ON: Children Writing in ESL*, written by Sarah Hudelson. The monograph describes how children develop as writers in English as a second language. It will be available in early 1989 from Prentice Hall Regents, Mail Order Processing, 200 Old Tappan Road, Old Tappan, NJ 07675, or by calling 1-201-767-5937.

Children whose native language is not English are present in ever increasing numbers in elementary schools in the United States. Educators, therefore, must provide opportunities for these learners to develop English-as-a-second-language (ESL) skills and to learn school content-area material. In elementary schools, particular emphasis has recently been placed on helping ESL learners become more proficient writers of English to ensure their academic success in English language classrooms (Allen, 1986; Rigg and Enright, 1986; Urzua, 1987).

What Do We Mean By "Writing"?

For the purpose of this discussion, writing is defined as the creation of original text using the individual's intellectual and linguistic resources, rather than copying someone else's text, using a prepared list of words to create sentences or stories, filling in the blanks, or practicing handwriting.

What Do We Know About How ESL Children Develop as Writers?

In the last fifteen to twenty years, elementary education researchers and educators have learned a tremendous amount about children's native language writing development. Examinations have revealed that, from early childhood, children work to make sense of written language. Children make predictions about how written language works and create texts based on these predictions. As the child's understanding of and predictions about written language change, so do the child's texts (Bissex, 1980; Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1984). The perception of the child as creator has been confirmed in studies of classrooms in which writing has been taught as a process of drafting and revising (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983).

Studies of the writing development of native speakers influenced other researchers to investigate the writing development of second language learners. The most general conclusion these examinations have reached is that the process of writing is similar for first and second language learners. More specifically, the following conclusions may be made about ESL children's writing development (Edelsky, 1986; Hudelson, 1986, 1987; Samway, 1987; Urzua, 1987):

(1) ESL learners, while they are still learning English, can write; they can create their own meaning.
(2) ESL learners can respond to the works of others and can use another learner's responses to their work to make substantive revisions in their creations.
(3) Texts produced by ESL writers look very much like those produced by young native speakers. These texts demonstrate that the writers are making predictions about how the written language works. As the writers' predictions change, the texts change.
(4) Children approach writing and develop as writers differently from one another.
(5) The classroom environment has a significant impact on ESL children's development as writers.
(6) Culture may affect the writers' view of writing, of the functions or purposes for writing, and of themselves as writers.
(7) The ability to write in the native language facilitates the child's ESL writing in several different ways. Native language writing provides learners with information about the purposes of writing. Writing ability in the native language provides second language learners with both linguistic and nonlinguistic resources that they can use as they approach second language writing. In addition, second language learners apply the knowledge about writing gained in first language settings to second language settings.

What Should Schools Do To Promote ESL Children's Writing?

Children develop as writers when they use writing to carry out activities that are meaningful to them. Teachers need to provide time for writing on a regular basis; they need to encourage ESL children to write; they need to promote writing by responding to the content of the text rather than to the form; and they need to provide multiple opportunities for writers to engage in writing for reasons that are real and important to the individual writer.

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Suggestions for specific classroom activities include the following:

- •Use diaries or journals to promote fluency in writing and to help students see writing as one means of self-expression (Kreeft et al., 1984).
- •Utilize personal narratives and writing workshop techniques to help learners become comfortable with the craft of drafting, sharing, and revising their pieces (Samway, 1987; Urzua, 1987).
- •Make the reading-writing connection by exposing ESL learners to a wide variety of literary forms in reading and then provide opportunities for learners to construct their own forms to share with others (Allen, 1986; Flores et al., 1985).
- •Incorporate various writing activities into content-area units so that ESL learners will experience the kinds of writing that will be expected in disciplines across the curriculum.

How Should ESL Children's Writing Be Assessed?

Assessments are important to the learners themselves, to their parents, to teachers, and to educators beyond the classroom or building level. Therefore, it seems important to advocate and promote assessment based, as much as possible, on daily classroom activity, that is, based on the observation and documentation of what children are doing in authentic writing situations in their own classrooms (Genishi & Dyson, 1984; Graves, 1983).

Classroom-based assessment may take many forms. Learners' progress may be documented through a systematic collection of children's work in writing folders, and checklists and anecdotal records may be used to note and analyze changes in writing over time. Teachers may carry out periodic observations of individual children, recording the individual child's writing behaviors and strategies within the context of the classroom. Children themselves may be asked to compare samples of their writing so that they may comment on their own progress.

At the school or district level, writing competence should be evaluated using holistic assessments of writing samples rather than standardized tests (Myers, 1980). Such assessments of actual writing come closer to reflecting the changes in teaching practices that are being advocated for both native speakers and ESL learners.

Resources

TESOL, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, has an Interest Section (IS) devoted to ESOL in the elementary schools (ESOL in Elementary Education). Members of TESOL may elect to receive the IS newsletter that provides many practical tips about ESL children's language development.

The National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education provides computerized searches on topics such as ESL literacy development, and a Teacher Resource Guide Series that includes titles on second language literacy.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics provides computerized searches on topics related to this *Digest* and is publishing a monograph by Sarah Hudelson on ESL children's writing development. The title of the monograph is *WRITE ON: Children Writing in ESL*; it will be released in early 1989.

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